

Summary: World War I

Causes of the War

In the 1900s, nationalism made countries such as Germany, Russia, and France compete for land and power. Some nations practiced imperialism and started colonies. Nations wanted to protect their empires, so they made their armies and navies stronger. Militarism became popular.

Nationalism, imperialism, and militarism were all causes of World War I.

Countries also made alliances with one another. The two most important alliances were the Allied Powers (or Allies), and the Central Powers. If one of the Allies started a war with one of the Central Powers, then all the nations in the alliances promised to join in and help their partners. In 1914, Austria-Hungary, a Central Power, declared war on Serbia. Serbia had an alliance with Russia, so Russia joined the war to help Serbia. Then Germany, a Central Power, invaded Belgium and France. France was allied with Russia. Because of their alliances, many countries joined the war. It was the start of World War I.

America Enters the War

At first, most Americans did not want the United States to join the war. But in 1915, Germany sank the *Lusitania*, a British passenger ship that was carrying many Americans. Americans were angry, but Germany promised not to attack more passenger ships. In 1917, Germany broke its promise and attacked American ships. The United States declared war on the Central Powers.

Both sides used new ways of fighting and new weapons. Thousands of men fought and died in trench warfare. Armies used poison gas, machine guns, hand grenades, and cannons that fired large shells through the air. They fought using airplanes, submarines, and army tanks. World War I was the largest war that had ever been fought. Millions of soldiers and civilians died.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

nationalism *noun*, the belief that your country deserves more success than others

militarism *noun*, the building of a strong military to frighten or defeat other countries

alliance *noun*, an agreement nations make to support and defend each other

trench warfare *noun*, fighting from long, narrow ditches

After You Read

REVIEW Why did so many countries join the war?

Underline the sentence that tells the answer.

REVIEW What caused the United States to enter the war? Draw a box around the sentence that tells the answer.